

Finding the Fountain of Youth

Exploring the Myth of Florida's Magical Waters

A. Archaeological evidence shows that Florida's indigenous people, such as the Timucuan and the Ocala, utilized Florida's springs extensively. Families of Seminole Indians were part of Ross Allen's attraction at Silver Springs in the mid-20th century.

B. Victorian-era visitors gather around a pool at the sulfur-laced waters of White Sulphur Springs in 1919.

C. A publicity photo of the Fountain of Youth in St. Petersburg in 1948, a park featuring mineral-laden waters frequented by the city's senior citizens.

D. Nancy Tribble poses in mermaid garb in front of an underwater sign at Weeki Wachee Springs in 1947.

E. A 1950s real estate ad for Sanlando Springs between Orlando and Sanford. Today the spring is part of a gated development known as "The Springs."

This exhibit is based on the book "Finding the Fountain of Youth: Ponce de León and Florida's Magical Waters" by Rick Kilby (University Press of Florida, 2013).

In 1513, Ponce de León became the first known European to officially explore Florida's Atlantic and Gulf coasts, but we may never know for sure whether or not he actually ventured inland to a spring. The peninsula's many springs were important to Native Americans for thousands of years before the Europeans arrived. In the 1700s pioneers began moving into the interior of the state, and some settled around springs. When steamboats and railroads began bringing tourists to Florida in the late 1800s, promoters and developers billed Florida springs as miraculous healing waters. Over time, roadside attractions popped up at some the state's more famous springs, and Florida evolved into a land of fantasy for tourists, where water-skiing elephants, underwater picnics, and real live mermaids became the norm.

Unless indicated otherwise, all images are from the collection of Rick Kilby.



A



B



C



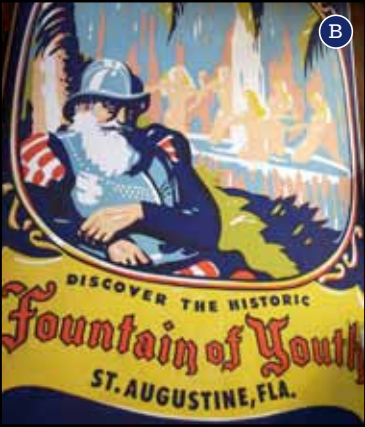
D



E

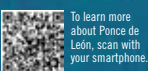
Juan Ponce de León and the Fountain of Youth

The Man & the Myth



Ponce de León, a veteran of Columbus' second voyage to the New World and the first governor of Puerto Rico, landed in Florida on April 2, 1513. The Spanish explorer was in search of gold, slaves, power, and prestige; there is little evidence to suggest he was on a quest for a fountain that bestowed eternal youth. Although it is possible Ponce was familiar with Taíno Indian legends about restorative waters, myths about such waters extend at least as far back as ancient Greece, and stories of healing waters can be found throughout spas in Western Europe. The medieval kingdom of the legendary Prester John was said to contain a fountain of youth, and one of the stories about Alexander the Great includes references to such a fountain. In the case of Ponce de León, the myth was not actually associated with him until more than a decade after his death.

- A. A vintage postcard from St. Augustine's Fountain of Youth Park shows Ponce de León pouring water from a well that appears to turn old people young again.
- B. A poster in St. Augustine shows Ponce sleeping soundly while youthful bathing beauties cavort in a fountain behind him.
- C. A contemporary Topps bubble-gum card uses archival art to portray Ponce's mythical quest as history.
- D. A 1952 Topps bubble-gum card asserts that Ponce found Florida because he was searching for the fountain of youth and he "kept hunting until he was killed by an Indian's arrow!"
- E. A 1970s ad shows Ponce rebuking a pesky insurance agent as he continues his search for the fountain of youth.



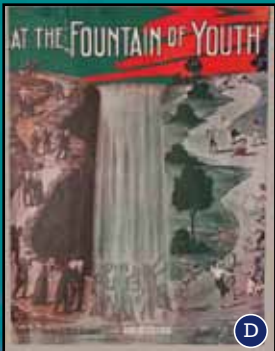
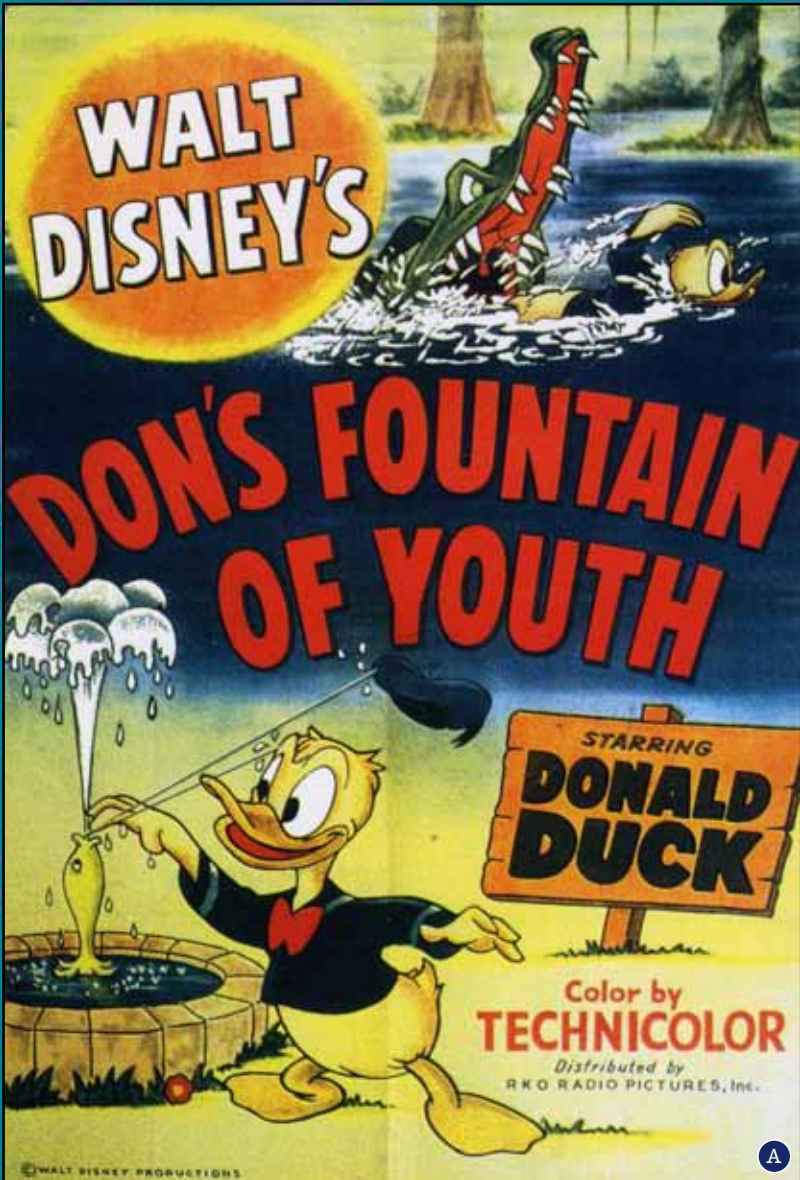
“There is no historical evidence to suggest that Ponce was even aware of the fabled spring, let alone that he risked life and fortune on a quest to locate it.”

– Historian J. Michael Francis



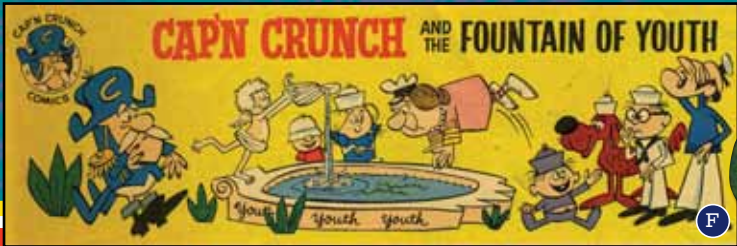
The Fountain of Youth in Pop Culture

Myth & Cliché



“At the Fountain of Youth, I saw
old rheumatics doing acrobatics,
Even saw old Rockefeller there,
He was busy combing his hair,
At the Fountain of Youth...”

– “At the Fountain of Youth” (1915),
Charles McCarron & Alex Gerber



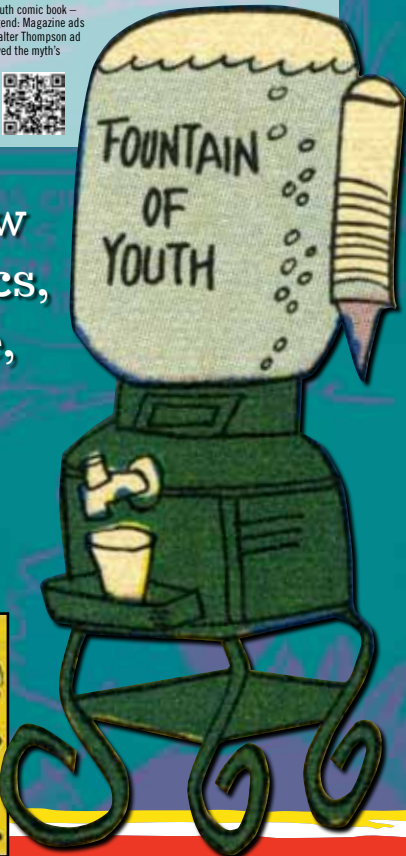
For years the connection between Ponce de León and the Fountain of Youth was so accepted in American culture it was included in everything from history textbooks to popular songs. At one point, Ponce's name and image were used to promote motels, attractions, and even the state as a whole. But as knowledge about Florida's history and its native people grew, the comical image of a Spaniard on a hopeless quest for youth-giving waters began to fade away.

Yet the fable has become so ingrained in our culture's consciousness that some version of the Ponce de León/ Fountain of Youth story has appeared in almost every form of media from advertising to comic books and from animated cartoons to full-length motion pictures. As we've turned our back on Ponce, the story of the Fountain of Youth, now a cultural cliché, lives on.

- A. Walt Disney's 1953 classic animated cartoon "Don and the Fountain of Youth" features a plethora of Florida clichés from alligators to flamingos.
- B. Although researchers have found that St. Augustine's Fountain of Youth attraction was once the site of a Timucuan village, the Native American in this promotional brochure wears a headdress indicative of the Indians of the American West.
- C. A 1950s Jerry Lewis comic book depicts the popular comedian interacting with the Spanish explorer and angry Seminole Indians.
- D. The popularity of the Fountain of Youth myth in the arts is comprehensive: A television pilot by Orson Welles, a play by Eugene O'Neill, and scores of musical numbers have exploited the myth's basic plot.
- E. Ponce de León discovered the Fountain of Youth at a Havana bar in the illustration on this vintage postcard.

F. A Cap'n Crunch 1963 Fountain of Youth comic book – Advertising also made use of the legend: Magazine ads for Otis Elevator, Monsanto, the J. Walter Thompson ad agency, and even Tootsie Roll borrowed the myth's familiar premise.

To watch a fun Ponce de León cartoon, scan with your smartphone.

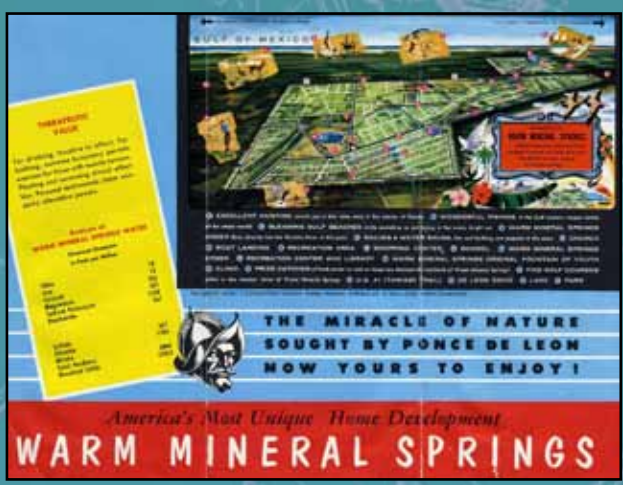


Selling the Magical Waters Marketing the Myth

Perhaps the advertising slogan for Florida should have been “the land of eternal health and endless sunshine.” From the earliest days of tourism, promoters of the state trumpeted its restorative powers, and northerners in search of better health escaped the frigid weather at home in resort hotels from St. Augustine to Winter Park. Writers Sidney Lanier and Harriet Beecher Stowe extolled Florida’s natural virtues and healthful climate in the 19th century; in the 20th century, several state agencies developed ad campaigns that extolled Florida as the land of miraculous health. Railroads opened up the state for growth in the late 19th century, and better roads followed after World War I. In the early 1920s, the rush to buy a piece of paradise sent land values skyrocketing, and even land around Florida’s springs was for sale. Today, increased population within spring sheds of some of the state’s most popular springs has resulted in lower water quality and diminished flow.



A. 1885 brochure created by the Silver Springs Florida Land Company made the claim that “one hundred thousand people go to Florida every winter for health.”
B. A button from the Courtesy Campaign sponsored by the Florida Council of 100, an organization of business leaders formed in 1961 by Florida Gov. Farris Bryant.
C. A Victorian-era advertisement, produced by the state, portrays Florida as a mythic, fantastic land.
D. A real estate brochure for Warm Mineral Springs in Sarasota County claimed that “every week, increasing thousands are now flocking to drink and bathe in its marvelous healing waters ... and to live here!”



“Picture to yourselves a charming vale surrounded by gentle hills, quiet, peaceful, harboring a constantly gushing spring.”
– “Ponce de Leon Springs: Florida’s Greatest Wonder & The Fountain of Youth,” 1925



Retirees flock to Florida

The Silver Revolution

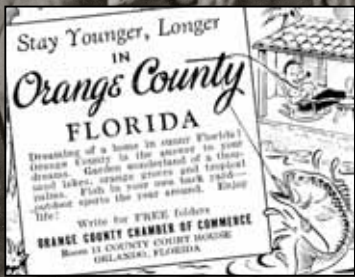
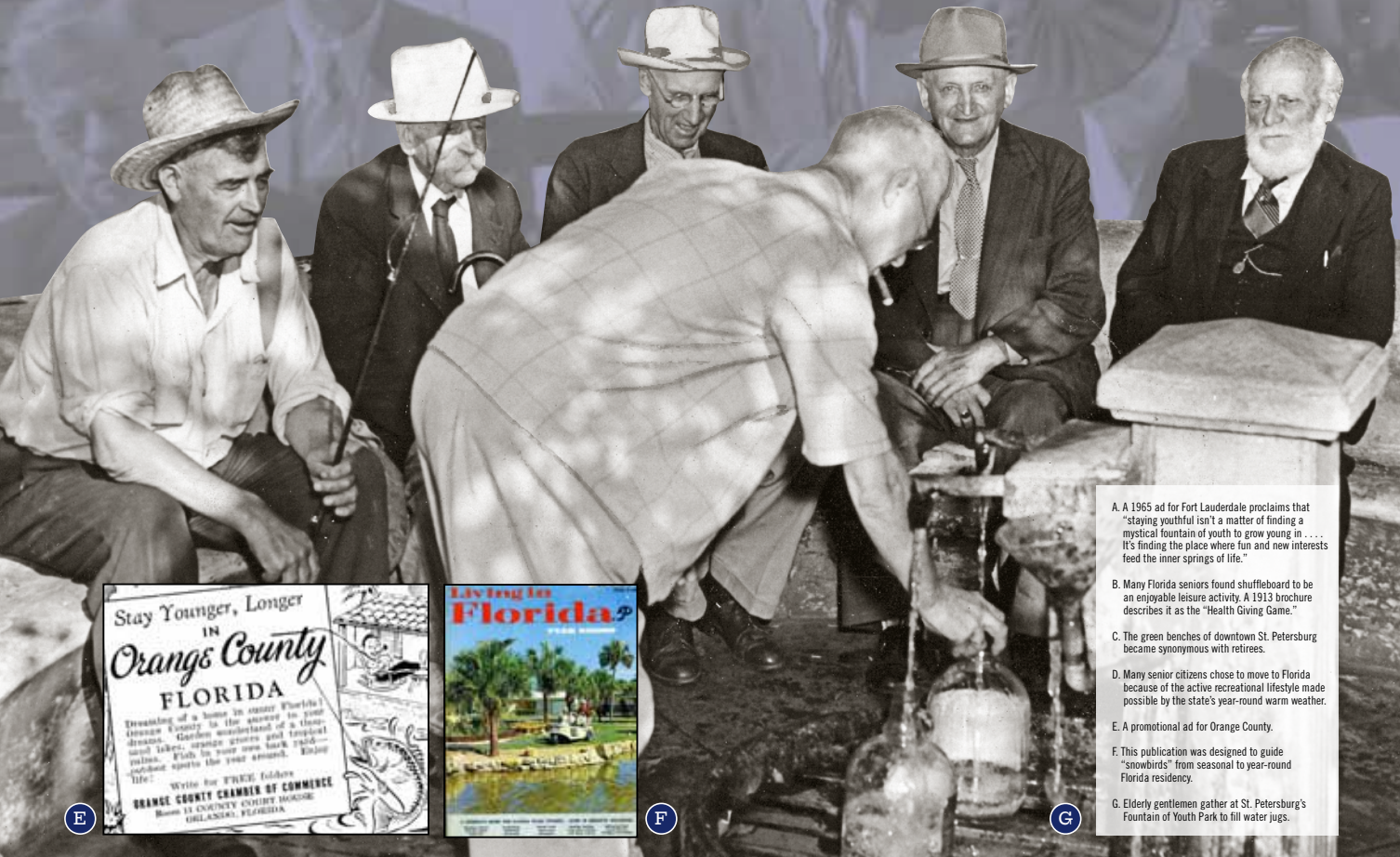
“My parents didn’t want to move to Florida, but they turned sixty and that’s the law.” – Jerry Seinfeld



As the lure of a healthy lifestyle in Florida entered the national consciousness, senior citizens in record numbers began to move to the sunshine year-round in the second half of the twentieth century. Advertising for the state “had long promoted Florida as a modern Fountain of Youth,” as historian Gary Mormino has written. Today the state is abundant with retirement communities and whole cities for retirees.



State Archives of Florida



- A. A 1965 ad for Fort Lauderdale proclaims that “staying youthful isn’t a matter of finding a mystical fountain of youth to grow young in . . . It’s finding the place where fun and new interests feed the inner springs of life.”
- B. Many Florida seniors found shuffleboard to be an enjoyable leisure activity. A 1913 brochure describes it as the “Health Giving Game.”
- C. The green benches of downtown St. Petersburg became synonymous with retirees.
- D. Many senior citizens chose to move to Florida because of the active recreational lifestyle made possible by the state’s year-round warm weather.
- E. A promotional ad for Orange County.
- F. This publication was designed to guide “snowbirds” from seasonal to year-round Florida residency.
- G. Elderly gentlemen gather at St. Petersburg’s Fountain of Youth Park to fill water jugs.

Land of Perpetual Rejuvenation

Restorative Health



In the late 19th century, St. Augustine attracted visitors seeking better health, like Henry Flagler and his ailing wife, Mary. Health spas opened around several Florida springs and along the St. Johns River. Spas opened at White Springs and Suwannee Springs along the Suwannee River, Orange Springs on the Ocklawaha, Green Cove Springs on the St. Johns, Worthington Springs on the Santa Fe, and Newport Springs on the St. Marks. Panacea Mineral Springs touted its healing powers in the Panhandle, and Hampton Springs in Taylor County counted Teddy Roosevelt among its visitors.

- A. Promoters for White Springs, or White Sulphur Springs, claimed the water had curative powers that could bring "relief from rheumatism, kidney trouble, nervousness, and other ailments," according to a website for the town of White Springs.
- B. In the late 19th century, a large health resort was created around the sulfurous waters of Suwannee Springs.
- C. A detail from a pictorial brochure for Wekiwa Springs (Orange County) touts health benefits for sufferers of certain internal ailments, circa 1907.
- D. Hampton Spring also had a large hotel built in 1908 around a sulfur spring said to have healing and restorative powers. The hotel burned down in 1954.
- E. Gilded Age visitors gather in the 1880s around a pool at Green Cove Springs, where the sulfur-laced waters began attracting visitors in the 1850s.

The South's Famous Health Resort.

"Way down on de Suwannee River."

SUWANEE SPRINGS,
Suwanee, Florida.

Situated on the Main Line of the Savannah, Florida & Western Railway.
174 Miles from Savannah, Ga.
90 Miles from Jacksonville, Fla.

Assured Cure for Kidney Troubles.

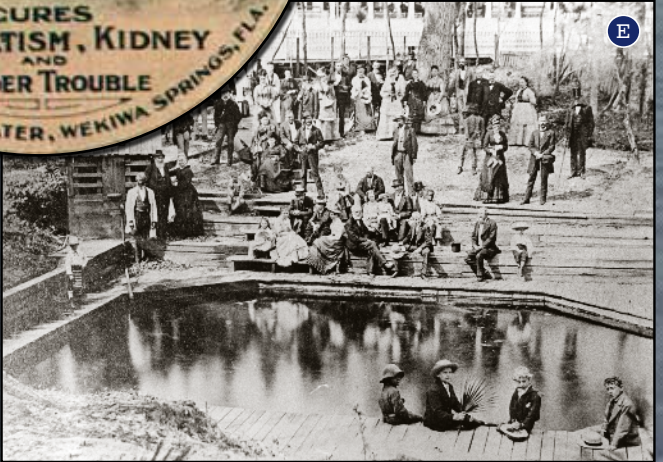
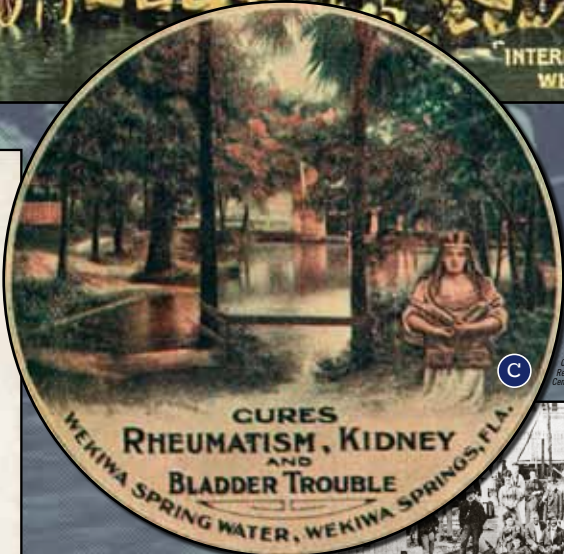
DAILY DEMONSTRATED TO BE

An Infallible Mineral Water

IN THE CURE OF
Rheumatism, Gout, Malaria, Indigestion, Nervous Dyspepsia, Constipation,
Loss of Appetite, Nervous Prostration, Skin Diseases, Liver Diseases,
Jaundice, Female Troubles, Femina and all Blood Affections.

Hotel Accommodations Unsurpassed

Obtain also at the Standard Guide Information Bureau.



To learn more about Suwannee Springs, scan with your smartphone.

“Guaranteed for Rheumatism, Indigestion, Dyspepsia, Stomach, Kidney, Bladder Troubles, Gastritis and Skin Diseases.” – Postcard for Hampton Springs in Taylor County

AGE 36—LOOKS 25!

The youth and beauty secret is your diet. The evidence lies in this glass of Vitamin "C" every day for drinking. (Served in a round Florida Citrus Fruit Soda.)

AGE 38—LOOKS 40!

When "C" is lacking, hair and body begin to show the signs of age. Vitamin "C" keeps the body's cells in a constant state of youth.

SCIENCE SAYS! This is the first time in history that the Vitamin "C" has been found in a natural source. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world.

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WHAT BRINGS ON Old Age?

GRAPEFRUIT

THIS CHART shows the relative amount of Vitamin "C" you get in 10 cents worth of the 3 leading fruits.

TOMATO PINEAPPLE

SCIENCE SAYS! Grapefruit Soda is equal to 10 cents worth of Vitamin "C" for you. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world.

GRAPEFRUIT SODA

Your physical body consists of some 36 basic chemical elements. Lack of certain foods clogs the body of these important elements—hastens the degenerative process. Postponement of old age depends to a great degree upon a balanced diet with sufficient Vitamin "C" every day.

It is true that some people "grow old" faster than others. While science has no way to indicate the cause in all such cases, there is no doubt to believe that liberal intake of protective foods postpones old age, maintains youth and vigor during the "middle years".

And this is scientific fact! Every day—home and body tissue must eat. It must be replaced. In this way, the body constantly renews itself, stays "youthful".

SCIENCE SAYS! This is the first time in history that the Vitamin "C" has been found in a natural source. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world.

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SCIENCE SAYS! This is the first time in history that the Vitamin "C" has been found in a natural source. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world. It is the only source of Vitamin "C" in the world.

Canned FLORIDA Citrus Fruits

GRAPEFRUIT SODAS • GRAPEFRUIT JUICES • GRAPEFRUIT SWEETENED GRAPEFRUIT JUICES • CITRUS SALAD

To see a vintage Florida orange juice commercial, scan with your smartphone.

Anthony T. Rossi of Tropicana is given credit for coining the phrase “a day without Florida orange juice is like a day without sunshine.” Before that, Orlando’s Dr. Philip Phillips, a pioneer in citrus marketing, urged the American public to “Drink Dr. Phillips Orange Juice because the Doc says it’s good for you.” From early print advertising to contemporary websites, the link between robust health and Florida citrus has been one of the most persistent messages to consumers worldwide.

The Health Fruits of Florida

FLORIDA CITRUS EXCHANGE

Sealdsweet Sugarcitrus Oranges & Grapefruit

From DK Young Library of Florida History, Department of Special and Area Studies Collections, Campus 4, Matthews Libraries, University of Florida

A. A vintage advertisement urges consumers to "hold youth, to retard old age ... watch your diet" and "eat plenty of citrus fruits – like Canned Florida Grapefruit Juice."

B. An archival brochure links good health to oranges and grapefruit, deemed the "Health Fruits of Florida."

C. A 1936 Florida Citrus Commission brochure describes citrus juices as "health building elixirs" that are an "essential part of our rejuvenating program for combating old age and chronic invalidism."

THE WORLD FAMOUS
DR. KELLOGG
TELLS HERE THE MOST
AMAZING HEALTH
STORY EVER TOLD



YOUTH
CAN BE PRO-
LONGED TO
3 SCORE & 10!

FLORIDA CITRUS



Selling Springs with Myth Ponce Was Here



“The miracle of nature sought by Ponce de Leon now yours to enjoy”

– Promotional brochure for Warm Mineral Springs

In Volusia County, owners of a historic spring known as Spring Garden opened a hotel next to the water and renamed it Ponce de Leon Springs in the 1880s. The spring developed into a full-fledged roadside attraction with water-skiing shows, electric boat rides, an exotic animal show, and even a water-skiing elephant.

Warm Mineral Springs near Venice also made the claim to be the Fountain of Youth sought by the Spanish explorer. A health spa opened there in the 1950s, taking advantage of the high mineral content of the 87-degree water. A plaque nearby declares the spring indeed to be the legendary waters sought by the Spanish explorer.

Wakulla Springs, developed by Florida businessman Ed Ball, advertised that Ponce de León visited the spring near Tallahassee on both of his expeditions to Florida. The lodge at the spring was said to be home to the arrowhead that caused Ponce's fatal wounds. Today Wakulla Springs is a state park.



To see Queenie the water-skiing elephant, scan with your smartphone.

- A. This vintage postcard claims that Warm Mineral Springs in Sarasota County is the “fountain of youth sought vainly by Ponce de Leon.”
- B. A brochure for Warm Mineral Springs states that “here you’ll enjoy a longer ... happier ... healthier life.”
- C. A vintage brochure for Ponce de Leon Springs in Volusia County features a cartoon depiction of the Spanish explorer in diapers.
- D. A 1920s brochure for Ponce de Leon Springs promotes amenities like a casino with a dance floor, swimming, boating and a children’s zoo.
- E. Warm Mineral Springs brochure portrays a beauty holding an amphora.
- F. Remote Wakulla Springs advertised a “new paved highway from Tallahassee to the springs” as a feature while offering scenic boat rides.
- G. Sunshine Sally was one of two waterskiing elephants that performed at Ponce de Leon Springs near DeLand.
- H. Promoters of Wakulla Springs attempted to tie the spring to the legend of Ponce de Leon with a rendering of a conquistador and a beautiful maiden.
- I. At Ponce de Leon Springs, mid-century visitors could not only swim in the cool spring but also enjoy entertainment by the “Jim Rusing Water Skiing and Boat Jumping Show,” and take a jungle cruise that glided by a giant cypress tree.



State Archives of Florida

Courtesy Tim Hollis

Early Fountain of Youth Attractions

It's in the Water

“One of the most important and romantic events in New World History was the search by Ponce de Leon for the Fountain of Youth and his subsequent landing here...”

– Mid-20th century brochure copy for the Fountain of Youth Park in St. Augustine



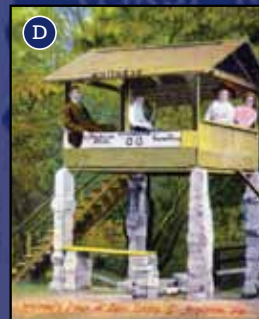
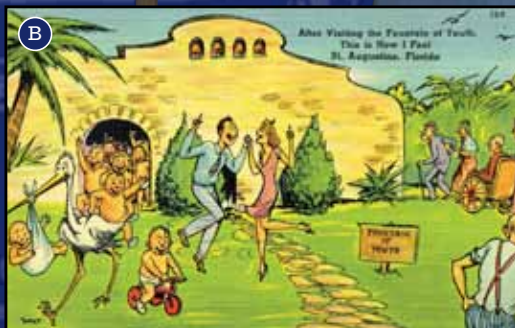
State Archives of Florida

St. Augustine was home to one of the earliest attractions that claimed to be the Fountain of Youth. Real estate promoter John Whitney charged admission to drink from a spring in the 1880s. “Diamond Lil” McConnell opened what is today's Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park in St. Augustine in 1904.

In St. Petersburg, a health spa also dubbed the Fountain of Youth began in 1908 to take advantage of the high mineral content discovered in a well that had been dug a few years earlier at the end of a pier in the bay. Eventually the “fountain” was moved inland and became the focus of a city park. It remains today as a simple drinking fountain.



To see St. Augustine's Fountain of Youth today, scan with your smartphone.



A. In 1889 St. Petersburg industrialist Edwin Tomlinson dug a well for a fishing hut at the end of a pier that stretched out into Tampa Bay, and the mineral-laden waters were soon dubbed the Fountain of Youth.

B. Babies abound in a vintage postcard from the Fountain of Youth in St. Augustine.

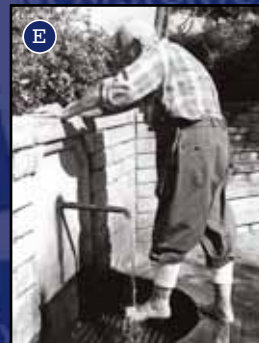
C. A mid-century tourist poses for a photo at the Fountain of Youth in St. Augustine.

D. One of the earliest hucksters to consciously exploit the Fountain of Youth myth was St. Augustine businessman John Whitney, who in 1870 declared that a small spring on his property was the Fountain of Youth to help sell real estate.

E. A man dips his foot in the water Fountain of Youth in St. Petersburg in 1958. The water was found to have high amounts of minerals, including lithium.

F. A Confederate Civil War veteran poses in front of the Fountain of Youth in St. Augustine in 1935.

G. Today the “Fountain of Youth” in St. Petersburg occupies a corner of a small park near Al Lang Field.



Visitors Flock to Florida's Springs

Underwater Magic



A



B

To see vintage footage of Weeki Wachee mermaids, scan with your smartphone.

Florida's springs were its earliest attractions. The notion of a place where reality was suspended and fantasy commonplace was on display in the crystal-clear waters. Many springs show archaeological evidence of thousands of years of use by the state's indigenous people before being "discovered" by European and American settlers. Northerners knew of Silver Springs as an attraction in the late 19th century, thanks to steamboats that traveled up the St. Johns River. In the golden age of roadside tourism, Weeki Wachee Springs became the culmination of Florida's illusory take on reality as surreal underwater scenes came to life before tourists' amazed eyes and the mythic was made real.

"Glass bottom boats, mermaids, underwater performances, petting zoos – Florida's tourist industry began with the state's natural springs." – Tim Hollis, "Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails"

C



HOMOSASSA SPRINGS
SPRING OF 10,000 FISH
"Nature's Best Kept Secret"
WALK UNDER WATER
U.S. 19 75 MI. N. of Tampa—St. Petersburg, Fla.

D



FLORIDA'S Silver Springs
FREE FLORIDA MAP INSIDE
NATURE'S UNDERWATER FAIRYLAND

E



Florida's WEEKI WACHEE
Spring of live mermaids
World famous LIVE mermaid show!
Unbelievable Excitement and Thrills!

F



Rainbow Springs
Underwater Magic Day Every Day
unnellon, Florida

A. A vintage postcard shows an underwater maiden with a breathing hose feeding fish at Weeki Wachee.
B. The current underwater theater at Weeki Wachee was built in the 1950s at a cost of \$1,000,000.
C. Homosassa Springs featured an underwater viewing area that was dubbed "Nature's Giant Fish Bowl."

D. Promoters of Silver Springs advertised the attraction extensively, including on Florida maps.
E. ABC-Paramount purchased Weeki Wachee in 1959 and featured celebrity endorsements in marketing materials.
F. Rainbow Springs, like Weeki Wachee and Homosassa, is currently a Florida State Park.